FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES WHICH APPLY TO THE ADMINISTRATION OF SCHOOLS AND CLASSES FOR THE BLIND AND FOR CHILDREN WITH PARTIAL SIGHT IN THE STATE OF OHIO

Prepared by
Robert B. Irwin and Lewis H. Carris

December 13, 1933

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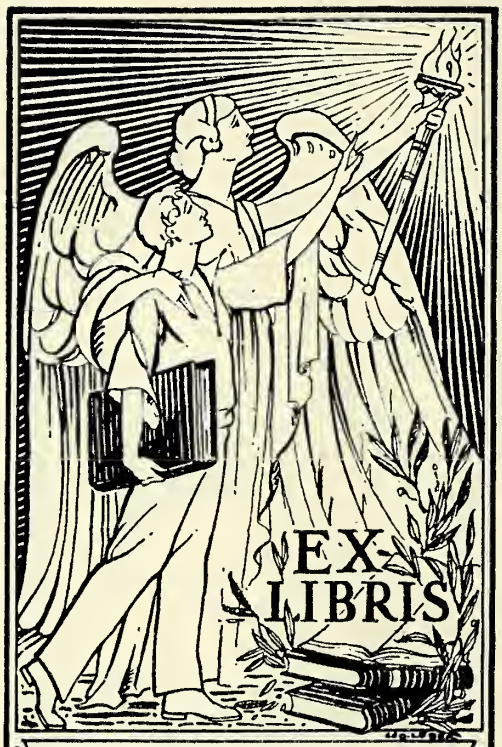

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Columbus, Ohio

on

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES WHICH APPLY TO THE ADMINISTRATION OF SCHOOLS AND CLASSES FOR THE BLIND AND FOR CHILDREN WITH PARTIAL SIGHT IN THE STATE OF OHIO

prepared by

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of Blindness

December 13, 1933

EDUCATION OF BLIND CHILDREN

HISTORY

The establishment of classes for the blind in the public schools in Ohio was in no sense a sporadic movement. It was part of a general trend in all child welfare work away from the institution method of treatment. It grew out of a conviction that so far as possible children should be reared in their own homes and under the care of their own parents. Failing any such home, it was felt that they should be cared for by a suitable family, and segregation in an institution considered as a last resort. This movement closed hundreds of orphanages throughout the country and converted many others into mere child-placing agencies.

Boards of Education in certain cities in Ohio accepted the principle that the blind child should be reared in his own home, or at least in a private family, and should attend the local public schools under conditions which in so far as practicable keep him in contact and competition with those with whom he must later live and work. Experience showed, however, that without some assistance from the State, Boards of Education could not be depended upon to provide all the special training required by blind children. Accordingly, in 1913 a law was passed extending a State subsidy to these classes and establishing a measure of State supervision over them. Gradually the theory was evolved that the State should meet all

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costs of educating blind children in excess of that of educating children with normal vision. This State subsidy, coupled as it was with high standard requirements laid down by the State Department of Education, gave Ohio a system of public school classes for the blind unsurpassed by those in any other State. Their excellence has attained an international reputation in which the people of the State take a just pride.

RELATION OF THE DAY SCHOOLS TO THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

The relationship between the institution and the day schools has not always been as close as it should be. This is easily understood as for many years the day schools have been under the general supervision of the Department of Education whereas the institution has been until late years under the State Welfare Department.

Furthermore, the administrations of the institution and of the day schools have at times held conflicting views regarding the desirability of institution life for blind children. The day school authorities have held that the residential school should be resorted to only in cases where the day school training is impracticable, while on the other hand, the institution authorities have often contended that the disadvantages of institution life in general are more than offset by the facilities which institution treatment make possible in the care and training of the blind, and therefore all of the blind children of the State should be sent to the residential school.

So long as these two conflicting views exist, and so long as there are surplus housing accommodations available in the institution, it will be difficult to maintain mutual confidence between the institution and day school managements. Now, however, that both of these activities are under the Department of Education, it should be possible to overcome the difficulty. Fundamental principles should be agreed upon and policies applying these principles should be worked out. The proper functions of the day schools and institution should be defined in such a way as to set at rest any feeling that either the day schools or the institution is endeavoring to gain any unfair advantage over the other. In all of this the one guiding consideration should be the welfare of the blind child, even though this policy might result in higher per capita cost, the elimination of certain employees, or the adaptation for new uses of certain existing property.

RECOMMENDATIONS .

It is recommended that:

(1) In cities where day school classes for the blind are maintained, all blind pupils attend these classes except --

(a) Where economic or social conditions make removal from the home imperative.

(b) Where the mental condition of the pupil renders him incapable of participating satisfactorily in the regular day school classes, and limited numbers make the establishment of special classes for retarded blind pupils impracticable.

(c) When by mutual agreement between the day school supervisor and the institution superintendent, special vocational or other instruction at the institution is arranged for. Such vocational training, however, should be entered upon with caution as most of the so-called vocations taught in our schools for the blind have merely a manual training or pastime value. Development of new fields of endeavor, such as flower culture, should be regarded as strictly experimental, and should be undertaken only when there is a natural interest in the subject, and when home conditions are unusually favorable to the success of such an occupation.

(2) There be worked out by the State Department of Education standards of admission to the day school classes and the residential school covering both eye condition and mental condition.

(3) A field agent be employed by the Education Department to operate in territories not served by day school classes. As the day school supervisor and teachers keep in very close touch with the homes of their pupils, it would be unnecessary duplication of effort to have the Field Agent visit in the homes of these children.

Furthermore, unless especially arranged for by the supervisor or teacher, visits by this agent in day school pupils' homes would lead to misunderstandings, and in some cases would be resented by parents, especially those who are in more comfortable circumstances and unaccustomed to the attentions of a social worker.

It should be the duty of this field agent to acquaint the Superintendent of the residential school with the home con-

ditions of the pupils under his care; to win the cooperation of parents in plans for the pupils' education; future employment; and necessary medical attention; to search out blind children who should attend school; and to arrange either by moral suasion or by court order for the school attendance of such pupils at the residential school or when deemed advisable in a city day school.

(4) A law to be enacted providing for the payment by a school district of a tuition fee to the State School for the Blind for each blind resident in attendance at such school. This tuition payment should be equal to the cost of instructing a seeing child of the same school grade in the local public school. In no case, however, should the parents of these children be called upon to make the tuition payment.

In view of the unusual success of the day school classes for the blind in Ohio, any plan to expand the activities of the institution at the expense of the day school classes should be looked upon with misgivings and with the full consciousness that any such movement is contrary to modern trends in child welfare work. It would be much more in keeping with present day tendencies to restrict the activities of the residential school, and try every plan possible to keep the blind pupils diffused in society generally by assisting them to make arrangements to attend the day school classes wherever possible.

We understand that the projected new dormitory buildings of the Ohio State School for the Blind, the erection of

which was contracted for on November 23rd of this year, make provision for an increased number of blind children over the total enrolment now accommodated in the institute. Prevention of blindness work during the past few years has resulted in a downward trend in the number of blind children in the State of Ohio. It is our firm conviction that in building for the future, this trend should be taken into account. Furthermore, in estimating future requirements, it should be borne in mind that already fifty or more of the present enrolment of the School for the Blind are partially seeing children housed in that institution, some of whom are in attendance in sight-saving classes in the city of Columbus. Since the plan of boarding sight-saving class children with blind children is still in its experimental stage, and considering that this plan does not meet with the approval of many of the most advanced thinkers in sight-saving class work, we strongly recommend that steps be taken before construction work on these buildings progresses further to alter the plans of these buildings in such a way as to make part of the living accommodations now projected available for instruction purposes. For example, if provision is not already made in these buildings for manual training and domestic science, a portion of the living accommodations might be re-designed for these purposes. If this is not done, the school administration may be embarrassed in the not distant future by superfluous space for residential purposes.

SIGHT-SAVING CLASSES

IN OHIO

Since there is, in the state of Ohio, a department charged with the education of the physically handicapped child, it seems only logical that every child included under the provisions of this department, who does not reside in a community in which educational provisions have already been made for him, should be reported to this department.

It should be the duty of this department to provide for the education of such a child in the community in which he resides wherever this is possible. This is in keeping with advanced thought and procedure by which every child is kept, just as far as it is possible so to do, with his own family and in his own environment.

THE EDUCATION OF PARTIALLY SEEING CHILDREN

I. There are several ways of arranging for the education, in their own community, of children known as partially seeing children - a group consisting of individuals who are not blind, yet who have too little sight to be educated in the same manner as that followed for the normally seeing. This may be arranged as follows:

(a) By the establishment of a sight-saving class in communities large enough to make such a class possible and feasible.

(b) By the establishment of sight-saving classes in consolidated schools which serve a number of rural or semi-rural communities.

(c) By the establishment of county classes to serve as much of the county as is geographically practical.

(d) By providing sight-saving class material for children in rural schools who may not be included in any of the above possibilities, and by giving such help to the teachers of these rural schools as will enable them to make the best use of the material for the benefit of such children.

II. If it is not possible to keep the child with his own family and in his own community for the purposes of instruction, one of two provisions may be made for him, as follows:

(a) Boarding such child with a desirable family in a city, town, or other community in which a sight-saving class has been established so that he may have the benefit of normal home life and the advantages of attending a sight-saving class.

(b) Boarding such child in a children's home in a city, town or other community in which a sight-saving class has been established, with arrangements for his attendance at such class. (This is obviously far less desirable than the previous suggestion since the modern tendency is to avoid institutionalism and to keep the child in his own family environment, or, failing this, in the environment of the best family life that can be given him.)

III. It is the opinion of progressive educators that partially seeing children should not be educated in a school for the blind. If, however, after every possible effort has been made, none of the above recommendations can be put into practice, and the only possibility of education open to them is in a school for the blind, such children should be housed and educated en-

tirely separately from the blind children in such school; their education should be based upon the best methods used in sight-saving classes, and provision should be made for such material as is suited to the use of children who, though handicapped by defective vision, use sight as the natural and chief approach to the brain. Such children should be taught by qualified sight-saving class teachers.

A partially seeing child is defined as a child whose vision in the better eye, after correction, ranges from 20/70 to 20/200. A blind child is defined as one with less than 20/200 vision. These standards are, however, qualified by the proviso that an ophthalmologist shall render final decision and shall make, in particular, recommendations as to the placement of the child who may, because of his eye condition, be considered on the border line between the blind and the partially seeing.

THE EDUCATION AND PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN WITH THE DOUBLE HANDICAP OF DEFECTIVE VISION AND SUBNORMAL MENTALITY

Placement of children with more than one handicap must be made according to the greater handicap, and since it is the consensus of opinion that a mental handicap is greater than a physical handicap, such children belong with the mentally subnormal. Where a sufficient number of children with such double handicap is found in any community to warrant the establishment of a class, either in a city school, in a consolidated school, or in a county school, such should be established in charge of a teacher trained, if possible, in teaching both the mentally

and the visually handicapped. If she is trained only to teach the mentally handicapped, the supervisor of sight-saving classes should give her special help and should see that such children are supplied with sight-saving class material.

If no arrangements can be made to keep such children in the home environment, or if the mental difficulty is so great as to require institutional care, such children should be placed in an institution for the mentally subnormal and be there given every eye help possible.

Mental subnormality should never be confused with backwardness due to eye or other physical difficulty. In case a partially seeing child is retarded because of his eye trouble and there is no evidence of actual subnormal mentality, he should be considered in the same category as any other partially seeing child, and his education should be arranged for according to the suggestions made above for partially seeing children. If the question of his mentality is in doubt, he should be given the advantages of a partially seeing, non-retarded child, but if at the end of a reasonable period, his mentality proves to be such that he belongs in the group of subnormal mentality, he should be transferred to that group.

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